

## World Cup gives city native ticket to translate abroad

*By Jeffery Kurz, Record-Journal staff*

ON THE WEB — Thanks to the Internet and a global telephony company called Skype, a conversation with Amanda E.C. Bligh is just a prearranged click of the mouse button away. Then she's on the phone, so to speak, her voice clear and amiable, as if she were sitting across the table of some café. You can almost hear the clink of glasses.

But the Meriden native is somewhere in Germany, where she's volunteered to work as a translator at the upcoming World Cup games. How do you spell the name of that city again?

The answer comes while she's talking about something else, text-messaged in an instant:

“Gelsenkirchen.”

It's one of the smaller German cities. The ones she likes. So much so that she's built a Web site for them: [www.smalltimegermany.de](http://www.smalltimegermany.de).

Gelsenkirchen, a city of about 278,000 in an industrial area not far from Essen, is also one of the smaller of 12 venues for the games. She figured she had a better chance volunteering for one of those, and she was right. She might be the only American working there.

In smaller cities you can get a better feel for the pace of life in Germany, she says, and they're more likely to be free of the fast-food ridden homogeneity of their larger counterparts. The evidence of history is also more intact, since they're not as likely to have been bombed to shreds in the Second World War, the way most larger cities were.

Amanda — her voice is so friendly it doesn't seem right to call her Ms. Bligh — grew up in Meriden, where her folks, William and Lee Bligh, still live, and misses the flowers of the Daffodil Festival this year. She went to John Barry and Washington Middle schools, then to Hamden Hall for high school, where she graduated in 1993.

She went to Colby College, in Maine, graduating in 1997, then lived and worked in Boston for eight years. She received her MBA from Suffolk University last year.

She's been living in Germany for the past year, on a Fulbright scholarship. She's researching German business at the International University Bremen.

Amanda studied German language in high school and college, and spent a semester in Germany her sophomore year. But there's nothing like a full year in the native country to hone one's language skills.

Putting those skills to use as a volunteer at the games was too good a chance to pass up.

“I saw it on Yahoo one day and I thought, geez, what a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” she says.

Let's see, how do you put this? The World Cup is to the world what the Super Bowl is to the U.S. Only more so. And with a lot more games (or matches). That sounds about right. Only in America do people not go completely bonkers over the world's soccer championship.

That's changing, however, as the game becomes more and more popular in the U.S. Kids here are now as likely to play soccer as any other sport. American fans are flocking to the World Cup this

year.

Hosting the games, as you might guess, is a very big deal. More than half of all commercials on German television have some kind of football (that's soccer to you) theme to them, Amanda says. Stores are stocked with World Cup merchandise. "It's on the news," she says, "on the news every day."

Amanda, who is 31, will work as a media liaison during the games. Her job is to assist journalists with getting around the stadium, with any technical problems involving the Internet, or with translating player statements.

Her big moment will come on June 12, when she will walk on the field and welcome about 60,000 fans to the game between the U.S. and the Czech Republic. She'll do that in English, the idea being to provide a welcome in the languages of the competing teams.

In early April, as a prelude to her volunteer duties, she went to her first German soccer match. Amanda, who knows her way around Fenway Park, says it's like a Red Sox game times 10. People "screaming, screaming, screaming and singing, whistling and other things too" is how she put it in an e-mail message to friends.

It was a home game for Schalke, which is near Gelsenkirchen, against Wolfsburg (which, incidentally, is Volkswagen's headquarters). Aside from a little corner of green, the colors of the visiting team, the stadium was a flood of Schalke royal blue and white.

Amanda had press access to the game, which meant great seats and interviews. In the stands, a game is a colorful blend of flags and banners, and noise. Fans wave scarves and sing, and chant the names of players when they score a goal.

Waiting for a streetcar to take her home after the game, Amanda stood out in a sea of blue with her yellow L.L Bean jacket. Some fans begged her for her game program and statistics sheet, which she cheerfully surrendered. Another group included a fellow more than a little sozzled, who tried to impress his friends by talking to her in what was badly broken English.

No doubt they were impressed with her alacrity, which is hard to miss even with an Internet phone connection.

"Going to that first game was a revelation," she says. Like a mass demonstration with everybody singing the same song. "I was completely floored."

She'd like to stay in Germany, once her Fulbright is through. There are oh so many reasons, including a boyfriend in Essen.

But she's not willing to do what many Americans do to stay, which means working as a translator or English teacher. She'd like some kind of consulting position. And there's the Web site, which she'd like to market a bit more. The site offers all sorts of interesting and valuable information about places many visitors might skip, but shouldn't. It serves as an English language guide.

"The first purpose in creating this guide is to be a resource to towns that may not appear otherwise in guidebooks, but are worth exploring," writes Amanda on the site. "All German cities have an amazing history waiting to be discovered."

"I want to continue visiting small towns," says Amanda, via Skype. "It's fun for me."

While you talk to Amanda using the Internet, there's a small icon accompanying her ID, a close-up photograph of her taken at the Empire State Building, the big city spread out behind her.

She's a long way from there now, where life is "a lot more relaxed," she said. "I would say the overall quality of life is better. There's not any pressure on you.

"I don't get the sense that people are willing to give away the quality of their life for their work," she says.

[jkurz@record-journal.com](mailto:jkurz@record-journal.com)

(203) 317-2213